

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 ~~Sub A~~ 1. A method for assisting a user in selecting one or more items from an item
2 set that best match a set of target preferences, the method comprising:
3 obtaining information from the user about that user's set of target preferences, using
4 direct questions;
5 generating at least one list of items selected from the item set that will best meet the set
6 of target preferences based on the information provided; and
7 generating a display including the list of items and explanations for at least one item on
8 the list of items explaining how well attributes of the at least one item match the set
9 of target preferences.

1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the item is a product, service or other
2 selectable element.

1 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the information obtained from questions to
2 the user is supplemented with other information about the user.

1 4. The method of claim 3, wherein the other information includes one or more
2 of information provided by the user during online interactions and information provided by
3 the user during offline interactions.

1 5. The method of claim 4, wherein the information provided by the user is one
2 or more of registration information, information about prior selections, information about
3 prior purchases and information about prior interactions with automated decision advisors.

1 6. The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of providing the user with
2 explanations of recommendations, where each explanation contains at least one pro or at least
3 one con, and the explanation refers to an attribute of the item and identifies how well the
4 attribute meets the user's set of target preferences.

1 7. The method of claim 6, wherein one or more pro or con includes a
2 reference to the set of target preferences.

1 8. The method of 6, further comprising generating a statement relating one or
2 more pro or con to a matching of an attribute and a recommendation for or against an item
3 based on indirect inferences from user inputs.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the variation of attribute value among the items is weighted to the values of the items with the high current ranking so that the question priority reflects the expectation that answers to the question are likely to change the ranking of the top ranked items.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the system mentions for each unmet requirements and selected combinations of requirements the number of items it or they eliminate as unacceptable.

20. The method of claim 1, wherein if no item meets all requirements specified by the user, the system displays a conflict page that mentions the fact that no items meet all requirements and lists the requirements that cannot be simultaneously met.

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